

Lazarus and the Rich Man

Sermon Outline:

Children's Church Dismissal and Announcements

Show The Good Place Video

That's part of a trailer from the show "The Good Place." Americans have a lot of competing views about the afterlife. But researchers say that if you believe there's a Good Place – then chances are you also think you belong there.

It's not just Christians disagreeing with other faiths that creates these competing views. There are also competing views within this room. (Sermon Title Graphic)

You might remember me sharing about a woman who was a shut-in at my last church. She had perfect church attendance her whole life and loved going to her Sunday school class religiously. And she told me she looked forward to death – She planned on living on a cabin by the lake where the temperature of both the air and the water would always be perfect and she'd have a cup of warm chai tea that was always full.

Despite having gone to church her whole life she still assumed that she was the center of the universe. "Of course the afterlife would be all about her and what she wanted and what she thought she enjoyed."

In Luke 16 Jesus teaches the Pharisees a lesson and the setting is: The Afterlife.

Scholars disagree with what to do with this text.

Open your Bibles up to Luke 16:19-31

If you're in the NIV then you'll notice in the subtitle that the translators were willing to call the parable before this a parable. But they don't call the story of Lazarus and the Rich man a parable. The New Living Translation calls them both parables.

So what's going on here?

Well parables usually are heavily symbolic. They use an earthly story to reveal a spiritual truth. Jesus might talk about a treasure hidden in a field but really, he's talking about the Kingdom of God. Jesus might teach about a man who scatters seed but really he's talking about evangelism. Jesus might talk about a prodigal son but really he's talking about Gentiles.

But the story of Lazarus and the Rich man doesn't appear to have any heavy symbolism. It's reads more like an example and less like a parable. When he's talking about a rich man, he seems to be really talking about a rich man. When he's talking about dogs, he seems to be talking about dogs, and when he talks about the afterlife he seems to be really talking about the afterlife.

That's not the only issue with calling this a parable. In Jesus' parables the characters are always unnamed. We don't know the name of the prodigal son, the shrewd manager, the woman who loses a coin, so on and so forth. This is the only time someone is named. We also see Jesus naming one of the players. In no other parable is a name used.

Let's read the text once through and then I want to analyze this and see what Jesus meant for his original audience to learn and what He might mean for us to learn as well.

Luke 16:19-31

¹⁹ "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰ At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹ and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

²² "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

²⁵ "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

²⁷ "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, ²⁸ for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

²⁹ "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

³⁰ "'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

³¹ "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

¹⁹ "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.

- Some translations say that he **habitually** dressed in purple and fine linen. That's what the original greek seems to imply. Whether he had something important to go to or not – he's wearing the best clothes. And you probably know that purple is the color of royalty. Have you ever asked "Why?" It wasn't random. Only rich people could afford purple clothes. It was a very costly dying process. The ink came from a snail that was so rare, it was worth it's weight in gold. Clothes made from the dye were exorbitantly expensive—a pound of purple wool cost more than most people earned in a year. This specific purple was said to resemble the color of clotted blood—a shade that supposedly carried divine connotations. Some Roman emperors forbid their citizens from wearing purple clothing under penalty of death. I read that one emperor forbid his wife from purchasing a purple scarf – not because she wasn't worth it but because they couldn't afford it. There's a leading new testament scholar DA Carson who says that fine linen was in reference to this man's underwear. Even his underwear was **fancy**.

- Where it says the rich man “lived in luxury” - Other translations use the words “**feasted** sumptuously everyday”

²⁰At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

- **Was Laid a beggar – Lazarus was physically disabled**, he didn’t stand or walk and he didn’t bring himself to the rich man’s gate. He was laid. people were bringing him to this man’s gate. This was the social services of the day. Lazarus wasn’t destitute due to laziness or a character issue. He simply didn’t have any options.
- **Named Lazarus**: Everyone knew the rich man’s name on earth – few knew the beggar’s name. But Heaven knows Lazarus’ name and is unaware of the rich man’s.
- **Covered with sores – Lazarus is Leprous**. The rich man is clothed in purple and fine linen – a supposed sign of god’s favor. The other is clothed with sores – a supposed sign of god’s judgment.
- **And Longing to eat** – as opposed to the rich man who feasted everyday, Lazarus doesn’t long for the feast, just the crumbs.
- **Lastly Jesus throws in this details about Dogs** – There’s so much meaning from this text. Dogs were unclean for Jews. They carried bad connotations. It was an insult to call someone a dog. But we see that even dogs are cared for by the rich man. He can’t bother with Lazarus but he’s more than happy to feed dogs. And lastly, the dogs have compassion for Lazarus. The Rich man isn’t capable of the love and compassion that dogs are able to show. This little note about dogs packs a punch.

²²“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

- Some translations use the language “**Abraham’s Bosom**” not Abraham’s side like the NASB
 - o When Jews had a **feast** they would eat at a low table and they’d lay on their side on low matts, leaning on their left arm around this low table and they’d have their right arm free. So they’d all be facing a certain direction. It wasn’t uncommon for a man to **rest** their head on the chest of the man next to them. And so if you were someone important, it was considered a high **honor** to sit next to you and to be able to rest your head on the man’s chest behind you.
 - o I love that Kory addressed this idea of male physical affection in other cultures in his last sermon. And let me just use a moment to add to that. Our culture doesn’t just sexualize everything but we’re coming out of a very homophobic era. I mean you can watch sitcoms from the 90’s - whether it’s a show like Friends or Gilmore girls and they’re both making jokes at the expense of homosexuals. For those of us who grew up during that time – any physical affection between men is seen as “homosexual.” I worked in Yellowstone with my best friend Ray. And when I sent out my resume I said, “I’ll only come if you hire my best friend.” And they hired us both. And so we came out together, we shared a hotel room together, and when our coworkers saw us at the grocery store, I had my arm around Ray’s shoulder. And literally the only way they could walk wrap their minds around the love that we had for each other was – They must be gay.

- So we read in John 13:23 in some more literal translations: “There was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved.”
 - This was the privilege of an honored guest and a close friend – it's a sign of intimate friendship and **love**.
- So where is Lazarus? He's at the place of honor at a feast – so to speak. He's intimately close in this friendship love with Abraham – the father of the Jewish nation.
 - This would've been scandalous. You can hear the objections from the religious elite: But Lazarus was leprous. But He was Lame. But He was Licked by dogs and covered with open sores. He's the epitome of unclean. He's got God's judgment written all over him. What's HE doing THERE?
 - **Where is the rich man?** He's in Hades. IT's a place of torment. The One who used to feast everyday while the other was in torment is now the one who is in torment while the other is at an eternal feast. The One clothed in purple is now clothed in flames. The one covered in sores is now covered in honor. The one who laid on the ground is now laid at Abraham's side. The one who was helpless and could not walk is now free and the other is bound.
 - Jesus is sharing some theology with us. And there's two things that people have done with this story. The first thing that people do is they say, “Jesus was using religious framework at the time to teach a lesson. He didn't believe this to be true but was simply using an extrabiblical example from Jewish or pagan mythology.”

- **Here's the issue with this belief. It's three-fold.**

- 1) What Jesus describes here is unique to **Jesus**. It isn't found anywhere else. There are similarities in this account found in Jewish and even Egyptian myths but this description isn't found anywhere else.
 - 2) Jesus is the first person in history who **calls** this place “Abraham's Bosom.” The nearest writing from a Jew where “Abraham's Bosom” is used to describe the afterlife happens in the third century – a few hundred years after Jesus.
 - 3) Whether you consider this a parable or not – Jesus never uses **myths** in his teachings or parables. Jesus never creates completely fictitious worlds for any his teachings. They're always grounded in reality – using real world examples. It would be out of character for Jesus to begin teaching spiritual lessons by using pure fantasy.
- The other thing people have done with this is said that it's real. The Church Fathers would most commonly recognize this story as being about the Intermediate State. Remember when we said that Christians had different views about “The Good Place.” Probably the most common picture that Christians have of death is going straight to Heaven to be surrounded by loved ones and there's probably clouds and angels. Other Christians would picture death followed immediately by judgment and giving an account for what we've done and then being led through the gates of heaven.

- The Orthodox view though – that is, what’s been taught by the majority of the Church is that we go to an intermediate state where we await Christ’s return and final judgment. The Righteous go to what we might call Paradise or “Abraham’s Bosom.” And the unrighteous go to Hades. And we see this affirmed by **scripture** and affirmed by **church tradition**.
 - Jesus tells the thief on the cross “**Today you will be with me in paradise.**” And He means it. Even though Christ’s return hasn’t happened and even though judgment day hasn’t happened, the thief will be with Jesus that very day. Why? Because the thief is going to the intermediate state – Abraham’s Bosom.
 - In **2 Corinthians 5:6-8** Paul talks about a time where He will be away from the body but home with the Lord. As a Jewish Christ-follower who thoroughly believed in a physical, bodily resurrection – Paul is talking about a bodiless intermediate state. It’s paradise, it’s where the thief was meeting Jesus. It’s Abraham’s Bosom. And it’s where Paul says he’d rather be. He calls it home with the Lord, but it’s not yet heaven.
 - In **Revelation 6:9** John talks about seeing the souls of martyrs who had been slain for the word of God and for their testimony. They’re disembodied. They’re with God but they haven’t reached the end yet.
 - **2 Peter 2:9** speaks of the unrighteous who are held until judgment – they’re in Hades.
 - **1 Peter 3:9** says that Christ went and preached to the unrighteous who were imprisoned spirits.
 - **Jude 1:6 and 2 Peter 2:4** speak of angels who are bound in darkness awaiting judgment.
 - **Revelation 20:14** speaks of final judgment when those in Hades, the intermediate stage, are thrown into a burning lake of sulfur.
 - This teaching comes from scripture, it comes from The Catholic church, The Eastern Orthodox Church, and the Protestant Church. **The Westminster confession teaches:** The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption: but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them: the souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God, in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies. And the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day. Beside these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledges none.
 - The one thing different church traditions seem to disagree on is **how conscious** these souls are. But the majority of the church does affirm the intermediate stage.

That doesn’t mean there’s no room for symbolism here. Almost every time scripture describes the afterlife it **uses metaphoric language**.

- Heaven is a banquet, it’s a celebration, it’s marriage, it’s a house with many rooms, and maybe you can think of others.
- Hades is outer darkness, it’s separation from God, it’s fire, it’s being held in chains, it’s weeping and gnashing of teeth.

There’s a way to take Jesus at his word here and yet still understand that Jesus’ words are describing something very hard to describe to a people who struggle to understand.

²⁴So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

- The Rich man still sees himself as above Lazarus. He doesn't speak to Lazarus. Instead he speaks to "Father Abraham." He must consider himself too good still to speak to Lazarus. Jesus reveals that the rich man was Jew, he says, "Father Abraham." It's gotten even more scandalous. This wasn't a wealthy gentile it was a Jew who calls Abraham "Father." And look - He's not asking for forgiveness, He's not asking to be brought to Abraham's side. He's asking for Lazarus to be brought to him and to serve him on the side of torment. The man still seems himself as above Lazarus. He won't speak to Lazarus or acknowledge him and at the same time he expects Lazarus to serve him.
- Notice too that the rich man doesn't ask for a glass of water. He just asks for a taste. And notice that the rich man who once wouldn't acknowledge Lazarus' existence is now willing to suck on his finger. He asks for just the smallest amount of relief. The tables have turned and the reversal is sharp.

The text has a lot to teach us and we don't have time for all of it. So what'd I'd like to focus on today are the three main principles that I believe Jesus was teaching the Pharisees and how we should pray in response.

1.) Jesus was teaching the Pharisees that we don't see people the way God sees them.

It's easy for us to read this passage and walk away from it debating about the reality of heaven and hell. It's easy for us to read this and want to talk about the intermediate stage.

Yet none of that would've been the thing that was on people's minds. The Pharisees would've been bothered to their core about a poor, lame, leper who was given the highest place of honor while a wealthy Jewish man remained nameless and experienced the judgment of God. How many Pharisees that day were calling Abraham "father" but were also subject to judgment? The Pharisees would've immediately felt insecure. They were not going to sleep well tonight.

It wouldn't take much for us to assume that many people knew the Rich man's name. Both men died. The Rich man probably had a lot of people pay their respects and show up to his funeral. But only Lazarus had angels carry him to heaven. And even if many knew the rich mans name - it's not recorded in scripture and it's not recorded in the Book of Life. Heaven hasn't heard of him.

But be honest - Who would you want to meet? The guy who was able to afford to dress in purple every single day of his life – who feasted sumptuously every day? Who had more money than the emperors of his day? Or the guy who couldn't afford to feed himself? Whose name would you be most interested in? Whose story would you be most interested in?

Guess whose name God was most interested in.

Jesus' main point in this story was: You do not see people as God sees them.

Our main concern in response to this passage needs to be – God do I see people the way that you see them? Are the people that I'm concerned with the same people that you're concerned with?

If we're honest – I think most of us suffer today from the same issue the Pharisees suffered from. We don't see people the way that God sees them.

In this same chapter Jesus says

¹⁵ "...God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight."

Our prayer, in response must be: God forgive me for not seeing people the way you see them and help me to see people the way that you see them. Who am I ignoring? Who do I need to be more concerned with?

2.) Jesus was teaching the Pharisees that we have to live for God, not money.

In verse 14 the Pharisees are described as those "who loved money."

Jesus spent a lot of his ministry talking about Hell and he also spent a lot of his ministry talking about money. He doesn't seem like he was very good at small talk. How many of you can relate?

In the two parables leading up to the story of Lazarus and the rich man – Jesus talks to the Pharisees about a son who misused his father's money and a manager who misused his bosses' money. In this story he talks about a man who misuses his own money. And altogether we see a major focus: What we do with money matters. How we use money matters. Whether or not our life is in service to money matters.

No doubt there are some in our church who serve God and not money. There are many in our church who use money as a tool and are stewards of it rather than servants of it.

But I think it's also true that there are some in our church who turn money into a goal. I want to own this car. I want to own that house. I want to be able to travel to this country. I want to make this many figures. I want to have saved this much money by this age.

And Jesus' whole point isn't that it's bad to have money but that we'll answer to how we spend it and that how we use it says a whole lot about our relationship with God.

When we hear this sermon – our prayer needs to be, "God help me to live for you and not for money." When was the last time we sat around thinking about the goals we had – not for our finances but for our faith?

Money needs to be used in submission to God and in service to his kingdom.

In verse 9 of this same chapter Jesus says:

⁹ I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

If the rich man had taken this advice – the end of his life would've been completely different. He would've been welcomed into an eternal dwelling by Lazarus. The reunion would've been immensely sweet – not unbearably sobering.

I love what Church Father John Chrysostom has to say: The rich man is not one who has much but one who gives much. For what he gives away remains his forever.

3.) Lastly Jesus was warning the Pharisees in hopes that they would repent

²⁷ “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family,²⁸ for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’

²⁹ “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’

³⁰ “‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

³¹ “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Remember – Jesus taught this to Pharisees who loved money. He wasn’t saying this to encourage those in poverty. Jesus’ point wasn’t to comfort those who were poor. Rather his point was to warn the godless rich. I’m not saying that He never comforted the poor. I’m saying that his words here are specifically meant to warn the Pharisees. He wants people to escape judgement. He’s burdened for the lost and for the unrepentant. He cares about those who are chasing after the wrong thing. NT scholar DA Carson says that Jesus talks about Hell twice as much as he talks about Heaven.

We said before that Jesus spent a lot of time talking about money and hell. Why? Because He believed it was worthwhile. Because for Jesus, the reality of hell was real.

Jesus makes it abundantly clear in this passage that how we live this life will dictate the next. He makes it clear that there is a place of torment. He makes it clear that it’s irreversible. There’s no coming across the chasm. There’s no going back. He makes it clear that people who are going there have no idea that they’re going there. He also makes it clear that repentance is the only way to escape it and that this repentance comes from listening to the Word of God.

In the story, Jesus quotes Abraham as saying, “If they don’t listen to the scriptures, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the Dead.” Jesus is talking about his own resurrection and He’s painfully aware that some who are there that day still won’t listen.

So what’s our prayer?

Pray: “God, help me to be burdened for the lost and to be motivated by the truth of your Word.”

Regardless of whether or not we’re good at small talk - we don’t like talking about Hell and I’m not convinced Jesus enjoyed it either. We don’t like calling people to repentance. We don’t like telling people to submit to scripture.

But we have to listen to the pleas of the rich man. “Won’t someone who knows warn my family?” How many people do we bury that end up crying out, “Won’t someone warn my family?”

When we read about Lazarus and the Rich man.

It ought to move us to pray:

- That we would see others the way God sees them
- That we would live for God and not for money
- That we would be burdened for the lost.